



Prudence Crandall Center, Inc.

Providing Comprehensive Services for Victims of Domestic Violence Since 1973

Appropriations Committee

February 23, 2022

Good evening Senators Osten, Kushner & Cicarella, Representatives Walker, Abercrombie & Betts, and members of the Committee. Prudence Crandall Center provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Berlin, Bristol, Burlington, Kensington, New Britain, Plainville, Plymouth, Southington, and Terryville. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

One-time CSFRF Allocation to Address Victims' Safety Risks & Needs - \$2,900,000

We thank Governor Lamont for his proposal to allocate **\$2,900,000 in FY23 from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund (CSFRF) to the Department of Social Services (DSS) to address victims' safety risks and needs, which have been intensified by the pandemic**, and urge your support. This funding will assist CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence's (CCADV) 18 member organizations, including Prudence Crandall Center with providing critical assistance to victims including sheltering/hoteling, food, transportation costs, basic needs, child care assistance, housing, moving, utilities, and furniture assistance.

Throughout the pandemic we have seen an increase in the complexity of issues facing survivors and financial support for direct client emergency needs, like those listed above, is a common request from survivors struggling to achieve financial independence from their abusers during the pandemic.

We recently provided shelter services to a mom and her 2 daughters. When they reached out for safe shelter our program was full, so we placed them in a hotel to be sure they were safe and to begin the healing process. After a week, shelter space opened and we brought them into the



Prudence Crandall Center, Inc.

Providing Comprehensive Services for Victims of Domestic Violence Since 1973

shelter facility where they could work more closely with our 24/7 staff. Mom received case management and assistance with finding employment – which resulted in her securing a job. Staff helped her apply for childcare support and connected her with our court advocates for services. After 3 months they were able to move into a home of their own and are excited to have a fresh start and a bright future ahead.

This allocation of one-time pandemic relief funding will allow our service system to provide much needed emergency assistance to survivors struggling to achieve financial independence from their abusers during the pandemic.

In addition to the emergency financial needs of survivors, this funding will assist with the ongoing emergency housing needs of survivors fleeing their abusive homes. For years Connecticut's domestic violence shelters have functioned well-above capacity with an average utilization rate of 122% between fiscal years 2016 and 2020, meaning shelters were overflowing year-round. But with the pandemic, shelter utilization has seen a sharp increase and the cost has skyrocketed due to the need to rely more heavily on the use of hoteling to properly social distance existing shelter space.

Since the spring of 2020, our emergency shelter has been especially strained and remains consistently over-capacity. To accommodate the “overflow,” we use hotel rooms and delivered meals, with staff traveling to provide direct care services to residents sheltered off-site. While not ideal, this has been the only solution available to DV shelters in our state. At our high point, we had 55 adults and children in our program funded to serve 22 max., meaning we were at 250% capacity. We are currently using 3-7 hotel rooms for overflow, with a cost averaging \$17,000 a month since July 2021. Low-income victims and children isolated in abusive homes have been disproportionately impacted, and we’ve faced a crisis of need like never experienced in our nearly 50 years of service. Some data demonstrating that increased need include:



Prudence Crandall Center, Inc.

Providing Comprehensive Services for Victims of Domestic Violence Since 1973

- **Emergency shelter over-capacity for more than two years, as high as 250%,** with as many as 55 adults & children on a single day in a program funded for 22 max.;
- Use of hotel rooms, delivered meals and counseling/case management provided off-site to accommodate the extra need continues to this day, **averaging \$17,000 monthly in extra, unfunded costs** in just the past 6 months alone; and
- **Total Prudence Crandall Center cost of hotels and meals during the pandemic period through 12/31/21 is \$379,650**

To date, we have received various pandemic relief funds through both DSS and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, as well as having the opportunity to leverage private philanthropic dollars. However, we anticipate that hoteling will continue as a significant cost through FY23. Additional one-time CSFRF will be critical to addressing the ongoing emergency shelter and emergency financial needs of survivors.

Annual Funding to Support Domestic Violence Child & Family Advocates - \$1,440,000

In addition to supporting the Governor's proposal for use of CSFRF to assist survivors, we're calling on the General Assembly to allocate **annual funding in the amount of \$1,440,000 to fund 18 domestic violence child & family advocates across the state** at CCADV's member organizations, including one here at Prudence Crandall Center. Connecticut currently does not provide any state funding to support this critical role within the domestic violence service system.

As the pandemic has stretched on longer than any of us originally anticipated, the secondary effects of this global crisis continue to play out in communities and homes across Connecticut. Much attention has rightfully been paid to the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and social-emotional development of children. This concern is only heightened for those children



Prudence Crandall Center, Inc.

Providing Comprehensive Services for Victims of Domestic Violence Since 1973

who, on top of dealing with pandemic isolation, have been experiencing domestic violence in their homes.

As we seek options to respond to this increased need, among our primary concern is being able to effectively meet the social/emotional needs of the increased number of children in our Emergency Shelter program – children who have experienced the trauma of being at home with an abusive parent and isolated from trusted teachers and other adults during the pandemic.

Research demonstrates that while each child's level of resilience varies, exposure to domestic violence puts children at risk for severe and potentially lifelong problems with physical and mental health, and disruptive behaviors with school and peer relationships. A recent study concluded that between March and October 2020, emergency department visits for children with mental health emergencies rose by 24% among children aged 5 to 11 (US News 10.2021).

Without effective interventions, exposure to domestic violence can negatively impact a child's social, emotional, and physical well-being, now and into the future.

Based on each child's needs, our Child Advocate strives to provide the resources and support needed to help them to reach their full potential at school and in all areas of their lives. While in our shelter, the children are provided with all their basic needs, together with access to a broad array of specialized, wrap-around support services to help them heal and address the emotional, physical, developmental, and educational impacts of domestic violence. To help our children build resiliency and become emotionally and socially ready to grow and learn, we must expand the capacity of our services to meet the increase in need we have experienced over the past 18 months and provide for the case management, counseling, and advocacy needs of our children.

Currently, federal pass-through funds in the amount of \$11,500 support only about a quarter of the cost of a full-time advocate. For Prudence Crandall Center that means that we have to seek funding from private foundations and other private sources to raise the additional \$40,000 needed to fully support a full time Child Advocate position. In the end, even with our efforts to cobble together the position of child & family advocate, we know that we aren't able to truly



Prudence Crandall Center, Inc.

Providing Comprehensive Services for Victims of Domestic Violence Since 1973

dedicate the time we need to fully meet the needs of all children experiencing domestic violence in the Central CT region we serve.

As we begin to come out of the pandemic, we are concerned that there will be a large influx of children presenting with significant need to various systems, including the domestic violence service system. We must be prepared to meet the needs of these most vulnerable victims.

Adequate state funding is needed to properly support a full-time advocate at each of the state's 18 domestic violence organizations, including Prudence Crandall Center. For a small amount of annual funding (less than 0.01% of the overall state budget), we can make a big impact on kids.

Thank you for your consideration.